



## 2004-2014: A Decade of SLAIHEE

- Reflections by  
Professor Suki  
Ekaratne,  
founding  
President

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## Thoughts on SLAIHEE's first ten years: improving Higher Education and also making it equitable in Sri Lanka

Suki Ekaratne, Director of Academic Programmes, The University of Hong Kong

It is pleasing to write a few words on the establishment and progress of SLAIHEE, started from discussions in my Zoology department room at the University of Colombo, when it has matured over its first ten years. These discussions originated in pressure to change support structures to junior colleagues. The significant force was from CTHE course participants who claimed that though they had been

transformed through the unprecedented support of CTHE course they followed at the SDC, University of Colombo, they had been bereft of support after course completion. More significantly, they said to me, as course tutor, that this lack of support was very unfair to them. This surprised me as I had theorized that the role as course tutor ended with the academics finishing the course and developing

into self-regulated learners so that everyone should have been left happy!

But thanks to them, I realised that developing professionals was not like teaching a university subject and seeing the backs of our students at the end of their examinations, which too, I then saw as conceptually incorrect! Delving into the change management literature revealed that

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## Conference 2015 - Outcome-Based Higher Education: Achievements, Challenges and Potential

The 11<sup>th</sup> Joint SDC SLAIHEE Conference on the above theme will take place at the University of Colombo on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

The only forum in Sri Lanka to showcase original research in the field of Higher Education, the conference covers all disciplines and spans generic interests. Past conference presentations have included such varied topics as student ethics, problem-based learning, learning styles, peer

evaluation, weblogs, learning management systems, feedback, English language and attitudes.

Authors are required to submit an *extended* abstract of a maximum of 4 pages to ensure that they are able to present adequate information on the prior literature that sparked off or supports the research project, detailed methodology and results, thus facilitating peer review. The deadline for submission of

extended abstracts is at 1.00 pm on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Please see the SLAIHEE website at [www.slaihee.org](http://www.slaihee.org) for further details.

The Keynote Speaker will be Dr. Gominda Ponnampereuma, Senior Lecturer in Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo and Consultant (Human Resource Development), Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century (HETC) Project, Ministry of Higher

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## Editorial

Welcome to the 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the SLAIHEE Quarterly! It replaces the SLAIHEE Newsletter, last published in May 2011, and, as the name suggests, we intend to publish it 4 times a year in February, May, August, and November.

The goal of the SQ is to provide a forum for those of us in higher education to share/discuss issues and activities related to improving teaching, learning, and curriculum in our respective universities in particular and in Sri Lanka in general. We rely on and welcome your submissions to make the SQ a success!

Each issue will usually include a special pair of articles in the category *Action Research / Reflective Practice*; readers are encouraged to submit write ups (maximum 1000 words) of their activities to improve teaching and/or learning. We will invite appropriate respondents to reflect on the activities in the light of relevant scholarship.

Submissions are also invited to the following categories: *Letters to the Editor, In My Opinion, and On Campus: Upcoming Staff Development*.

Please email your submissions to [editorSLAIHEEQ@gmail.com](mailto:editorSLAIHEEQ@gmail.com).

Rapti de Silva



A presentation at the 2014 conference

## Letters to the Editor

Letters should be kept to approximately 200 words. They may be further edited for length.

**RE: SDC-SLAIHEE joint workshop on "Getting Ready to Conduct Successful Research: Effective Literature Searches, Surveys and Reviews" held on the 20th November 2014 at University of Colombo.**

Dear Editor,

I wish to share my reflection on the above workshop which I attended and found very interesting and helpful.

Apart from dissemination of knowledge, conducting research is a major component in the career of an academic. As a fairly new recruit to the academia of the Faculty of Medicine, this workshop was helpful to refresh as

well as acquire knowledge on literature searches, surveys and reviews. It was a tailor made guide to proper initiation of a research and helpful for anyone interested in research, especially young academics.

The workshop was well organised with a methodical flow of lectures and activities. Speakers made sure the lectures were effective, easy to understand and not boring! The hands on activities helped the participants to realize how much they captured from the lectures and clear their doubts. Since the responses to the activities were discussed by the speakers there was also a self-evaluation. Further, the environment provided by the Staff Development Centre of the University was ideal for hassle free learning as well as

teaching.

It is my sincere wish that SDC and SLAIHEE should continue this joint venture. Future workshops may include topics such as other aspects relating to conducting research, report writing or updating the academia on latest developments in the field of teaching.

In conclusion I wish to congratulate the SDC and SLAIHEE for carrying out a very successful workshop which immensely benefited the participants to acquire or refresh their knowledge.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hermali Silva  
Lecturer (Probationary),  
Departemnt of Parasitology,  
Faculty of Medicine,  
University of Colombo.

## Past President Reflects on Role of the Executive Committee

Shrinika Weerakoon, University of Colombo

When Rapti invited me to write about the past three-year period during which I served as the president of SLAIHEE, the role of the executive committee came to my mind first, and accordingly, I decided to write about the executive committee of SLAIHEE. The executive committee played a silent guiding role in improving higher education effectiveness and this was invaluable and of immense benefit.

Having served in several positions of the SLAIHEE executive committee I

know the time commitment one makes to perform the work assigned to those voluntary positions. The time commitment is even more for those academics who are not from the universities in and around Colombo as the executive committee met in Colombo.

One of the key characteristics I saw clearly in the executive committee members was the ability to work collegially, listen actively and support each other. It is indeed a pleasure to

look back and recall how supportive, collegial and dedicated the members of executive committee had been, and it had been so since the inception of SLAIHEE. Meetings and discussions on various topics and concerns had always been in the spirit of advancement and support. From time to time, those discussions were further enriched by contributions by the founder of SLAIHEE, whenever he was in the country.

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## Workshop on *Getting Ready to Conduct Research: Effective Literature Searches, Surveys, and Reviews*

The above SLAIHEE workshop was conducted in November 2014 at the SDC, University of Colombo which co-sponsored the event. While reviewing papers submitted for the annual SLAIHEE conference over the last few years, the need for such a workshop had become evident.

Based on the identified needs, the workshop learning outcomes were to enable participants to

- access and evaluate relevant research in an efficient manner in order to conduct an effective scholarly literature search
- use academic reading and different note taking methods in order to conduct an in-depth literature survey

- synthesize the available literature in order to write a methodical, coherent literature review that will lead to a suitable research question
- paraphrase or quote appropriately in order to avoid plagiarism when using material from published research

Participants were also briefly introduced to how to cite and reference published research according to given guidelines so as to acknowledge previous work in the field in a consistent and accurate manner.

The workshop was designed to be “hands on” with participants applying what they learnt: they conducted online literature

searches, read and took notes on pre-selected short articles (on outcomes based education), and worked in jigsaw groups to share and synthesize their readings and create brief literature reviews leading to suitable research questions.

Based on participant evaluations, the workshop appears to have been a great success. SLAIHEE plans to offer the workshop at other campuses in collaboration with their staff development centers.

**Please contact the SLAIHEE secretary at [slaihee@gmail.com](mailto:slaihee@gmail.com) if you wish to host this workshop at your institution!**

### Current SLAIHEE ExCo

#### President

**Dr. Enoka Corea**  
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Medicine  
University of Colombo

#### Secretary

**Dr. Iroja Caldera**  
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Science  
University of Colombo

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Senior Lecturer, Staff Development Centre  
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Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering  
University of Moratuwa

**Hasith Kandaudahewa**  
Lecturer (Probationary), Faculty of Arts  
University of Colombo

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*“While reviewing papers submitted for the annual SLAIHEE conference over the last few years, the need for such a workshop had become evident.”*

## Thoughts on SLAIHEE's first ten years... (cont. from p. 1)

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*“without facilitating this type of teaching research engagement, the inequitable HE we see in Sri Lanka today cannot be averted and transmission-style teaching devoid of student skills integration will continue thus making a social parody of the ‘free’ HE concept”.*

professional development was indeed an arduous voyage that gave individuals the wherewithal to enter a lifelong journey that changed them from a traditional ‘fixed mindset’ to a ‘growth mindset’ (Dweck 2009a, b; 2010). Often, this makes academics to ‘see’, think, conceptualise and act differently, in turn producing an insatiable desire to become proactive, becoming interested in improving oneself as well as others. It is then that their journey traverses through ‘deliberative’ to ‘personalistic’ to ‘critical’ reflective practitioners (Valli, 1997). Viewed through this lens, it was not surprising that their CTHE development made these academics prod us into forming SLAIHEE!

SLAIHEE was thus our response to establish a supportive forum for junior academics to show their worth as innovative academics to initiate transforming Sri Lankan HE with training and developmental guidance by supportive seniors. While SLAIHEE conducted continuous professional developmental workshops for university colleagues even outside the Association’s membership, the main activity focused around its annual conference. Over the last ten years, the conferences succeeded in attracting over 1500 academics to participate

and discuss learning enhancement methodologies directly applicable in the Sri Lankan Higher Education (HE) context, with some 150 papers presented at conference sessions. While most papers were by junior academics, the healthy balance of some seniors presenting at the ten conferences have enabled junior academics to see the nature of teaching development presentations, as a similar regular conference is not held elsewhere in Sri Lanka. This developmental activity has also embraced a wider academic community in the process of peer review and feedback, creating and supporting a culture for enhancing Sri Lankan university practices by a broader academic community.

While courses such as the CTHE are very valuable and indispensable to facilitate academics changing from ‘traditional’ teaching to ‘scholarly teaching’ where they integrate evidence-based teaching methods into teaching practices, it is, however, SLAIHEE that has fostered their next-stage teaching change to embody a ‘scholarship of teaching’ (Boyer, 1991) through providing the conference opportunities. The latter have encouraged academics to develop as active researchers into teachers who can contribute to the expansion of the pedagogic base. The

benefit of active research to advance the intellect and growth mindset has been shown even in undergraduates (e.g., Healey, 2006) and it is therefore a very valuable and unprecedented contribution that SLAIHEE has brought about in facilitating young academics to focus on research in teaching-learning. That such research is seen only rarely in senior academics, who are not associated with SLAIHEE, adds still greater value to these mindset changes that SLAIHEE has been able to achieve in Sri Lanka.

Of even greater significance is that, without facilitating this type of teaching research engagement, the inequitable HE we see in Sri Lanka today cannot be averted and transmission-style teaching devoid of student skills integration will continue thus making a social parody of the ‘free’ HE concept. Many in Sri Lanka talk about it and lament about it, but SLAIHEE has acted positively to create pathways to begin addressing one of its major underlying causes, becoming ‘an island of excellence in a sea of mediocrity’.

While the academic community and SLAIHEE membership have benefited in these diverse ways, knock-on effects on HE, such as on policy

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## Thoughts on SLAIHEE's first ten years... (cont. from p. 4)

improvements, have also been produced. Ten years back, around when SLAIHEE was established, writing in the Editorial of the first Staff Development Newsletter of the UGC, I asked "*Has the under-emphasis on effective skill-based teaching in universities become an important policy disjunct that will persist to contribute to continued graduate unemployment and resulting social discontent/upheaval?*"

While it is clear that considerable work is required to further address this satisfactorily, the SLAIHEE approach in teaching methodology development has contributed also to policy level changes, such as the UGC recognizing staff development as an area of significant value by establishing a 'Standing Committee on Staff Development' at UGC level and through the establishment of SDC's at universities with support of an annual grant. The recognition given to teaching development aspects in academic promotions has also been new inputs in Sri Lanka. The changes to academic 'vocabularies' to include teaching and learning related terms when discussing HE matters is

another noteworthy contribution to having changed WTPs in Sri Lankan HE (Ways of Thinking and Practices; Entwistle 2005; Meyer and Land 2003).

This brief write-up shows that SLAIHEE has come a long way from its establishment ten years back and has been able to effectively "find (her) voice and inspire others to find theirs". This phenomenon, described by Stephen Covey, the widely respected management and development expert, is how a change from 'leadership' to 'greatness' takes place (Covey, 2004) and is reflected in the work that SLAIHEE has done. Indeed, it seems that this voluntary Association will not stop there but can journey into another step, sometimes ascribed to Covey as the 9<sup>th</sup> and final greatness. This is to 'leave a healthy legacy behind' which began ten years back with SLAIHEE establishing this open and supportive learning community (Cox, 2004) and helping to pave the way to ensure equitability in the provision of HE in our motherland.

[Abbreviations: CTHE = Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education; SDC = Staff Development Centre]

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## 11th SDC-SLAIHEE Annual Conference

### "Outcome-Based Higher Education: Achievements, Challenges and Potential"

Extended abstracts of papers are invited on the above theme.

Conference: June 26<sup>th</sup> 2015. Deadline for submission of extended abstracts: 1.00 pm on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2015.

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**improving teaching  
and learning  
effectiveness**  
by actively supporting  
educational developers  
and leaders in higher  
education in  
Sri Lanka.

## Past President Reflects ... (cont. from p. 3)

We had very junior lecturers, professors, librarians and other lecturers of varying seniorities in the university structure working together in a setting that was very different to the normal university hierarchy. Diversity has been a continuing characteristic of the executive committee from the start, not only because of the representation across levels of seniority, but also because of the subject disciplines represented by the members. The common factors all shared were

the CTHE or ASTHE course at the Staff Development Centre, University of Colombo and the commitment and passion to contribute towards improving higher education in our country.

For bringing about this improvement, the executive committee had to take calculated risks appropriately and it did not shy away from doing so after due consideration. One example of a big risk it took during the recent period was in adopting the fully online conference system. It was a huge time commitment and

dedication of the committee members who were involved in introducing the SLAIHEE online conference system and a shared responsibility of the entire executive committee. It was a great relief and a joy to see the SLAIHEE online conference system successfully implemented. In these ways, the executive committee was able to go forward with one voice and without hesitating when action was needed, bound together by a common cause to improve higher education in Sri Lanka.

## Conference 2015 ... (cont. from p. 1)

Education, Sri Lanka. He will speak on "Outcome-based education: a formula toward holistic education."

Dr. Ponnampereuma has served as invited speaker cum resource person in many international symposia and conferences. Author of several journal articles

and books, he is a peer reviewer of many international journals and sits on the editorial boards of three international medical education journals. He has served as an advisor, visiting professor and fellow of several academic institutes of repute and has also carried out consultations for

educational projects. He is a postgraduate tutor, examiner, and resource material developer for national and international medical education courses. His research interests are on assessment (including selection for training), and curriculum development and evaluation.

## On Campus: Upcoming Staff Development (March-May)

Staff Development Centers at all SL institutions of higher education are invited to submit details of **activities related to improving teaching and learning** that will take place during the next quarter.

### University of Colombo:

Workshop on "The making of experts: Developing expertise in what we do and what our students can do"

by Professor Suki  
Ekaratne, Director of

Academic Programmes,  
The University of Hong  
Kong. Tuesday March 3<sup>rd</sup>,  
9.00 am to 3.30 pm.

**Application deadline  
February 20.**